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President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Mr. Hashi (Somalia): At the outset, allow me to express to you, Mr. President, our deepest appreciation for reconvening the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly to address the tsunami disaster that has devastated a number of countries in Asia and Africa. I also take this opportunity to express once again our profound condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, India, Thailand, Kenya, Tanzania and the Seychelles. The devastation was of great magnitude and resulted in unprecedented loss of life and destruction. We also offer our deepest condolences to all the other countries that lost citizens in the wake of this disaster.

The response of the international community was prompt and generous. The United Nations flash appeal and pledges by Members of the United Nations, together with the involvement of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, will surely mitigate the effects of the tsunami. In that regard, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for launching the United Nations flash appeal and for other initiatives that he undertook. The commitment by the international community to long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction is appropriate and most welcome. I also take this opportunity to commend the United Nations relief agencies for their tireless efforts in coordinating relief assistance in Somalia and other affected countries.

Somalia is one of the African countries seriously affected by the tsunami. On the morning of 26 December, fishing communities along Somalia's vast coastline — the longest in Africa — were preparing for the beginning of their day. Almost eight hours after the tsunami hit Asia, they had no idea that their lives would be changed forever. The tsunami pounded almost 700 kilometres of the Somali coastline, from the northern tip of Hafun to the southern coast of Mogadishu and beyond.

A delegation from the Government of Somalia recently visited the affected areas to assess the extent of the damage caused by the tsunami. The current death toll is estimated at 500, and over 100,000 people are estimated to have been displaced and left homeless. It is worth noting that, with proper early-warning systems in place in the Indian Ocean, eight hours would have been sufficient time to evacuate and spare the lives of countless victims. In this regard, we support the establishment of regional early-warning systems in the Indian Ocean and beyond, as envisaged in the draft resolution before the Assembly.

The effects of the tsunami will no doubt leave a lasting mark on Somalia for some time to come. The affected areas — especially in the rural town of Hafun, where over 95 per cent of homes were destroyed — are currently in a state of complete destruction and

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dissolution. Homes, roads, hospitals and schools no longer exist. Local fishing communities have been decimated to the point where almost all the boats — 12,600 of them — and nets are gone, and those that remain are severely damaged and pose a safety risk. The displaced are being sheltered under plastic sheeting provided by UNICEF or in huts made from branches, leaving many of those affected without proper sanitation and with very little clean water, medicine or much-needed food.

As a result of the tsunami, the geographical outline of Somalia's north-eastern coast has been altered, and residents have no choice but to rebuild their homes inland so as to avoid being flooded when sea levels rise. The makeshift camps are extremely overcrowded, and outbreaks of malaria, cholera, typhoid, respiratory infections and other diseases may therefore result. The World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relief agencies and non-governmental organizations are doing their best under extremely difficult circumstances. But there is a greater need for a comprehensive assessment of the physical and psychological damage suffered by the victims of the tsunami in Somalia.

The relief agencies in the affected areas of Somalia are also in need of immediate assistance themselves. Facing poor road conditions, poor communication networks and the daunting challenge of feeding and sheltering thousands, these relief agencies are in dire need of more efficient means of reaching isolated areas and villages in the north-eastern coastal towns of Somalia that are still partly submerged.

It is also worth noting that, prior to the tsunami, the affected region was already suffering from a large-scale humanitarian crisis, with a four-year drought, periodic flooding and unusually cold temperatures. Furthermore, the tsunami coincided with an important milestone in the history of Somalia, namely, the recent formation of an all-inclusive Government of National Unity for Somalia. However, the already dire humanitarian situation, coupled with the tsunami, poses considerable new challenges for the incipient Government of Somalia. This underlines the urgent need to support the new Government.

I call on all nations to come to Somalia's aid to help us to strengthen our political will, capacity and humanitarian coordination in order to best alleviate the impact of this crisis. We appeal to those developed countries that are in a position to make a difference. This disaster requires a continued commitment for the long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction of the social and economic fabric that has been shredded in all the countries affected by the tsunami. We also call on those generous nations that have pledged support and assistance to expedite the much-needed resources required to sustain and rebuild the livelihoods of those in despair.

I would like to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its leadership, as well as WFP, WHO, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and all the other relief agencies involved, for their hard work and perseverance in our time of need.

Finally, I am sure that expressions of human solidarity at this critical time will be extended to those who need help.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like, first of all, to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting to consider the tragic effects of the natural disaster that struck South Asia and South-East Asia. We would also like to thank the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the current Chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, for having taken the initiative to call for this meeting on what is known worldwide as the tsunami disaster.

Hundred of thousands of innocent victims were struck by this natural disaster in a few minutes, perhaps seconds, in Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Malaysia, as well as in countries thousands of miles away such as Kenya and brotherly Somalia, where hundreds of people were wiped out by the tsunami. The world has witnessed many devastating natural disasters, but it could be said that this one, which has taken hold of the conscience of the entire world, has opened our eyes to the importance of acting together, immediately, to mitigate the consequences of such a catastrophe, which has killed some 172,000 people, including children, women and the elderly. It has displaced millions of citizens, separating them from their families, places of work, homes and lands. Within just a few seconds they found themselves

without family — without children, spouses mothers and fathers.

The swift reaction of the States Members of our Organization demonstrates the solidarity and attentiveness of the international community in reacting to this disaster, which has affected mankind as a whole.

As a sign of this solidarity with sisterly and friendly peoples, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic sent telegrams of condolences and sympathy on behalf of the Syrian Arab people to the leaders of peoples affected by the earthquake and the tsunami.

Syria expresses its sorrow and its solidarity with the Governments and the peoples of the affected countries. We have sent material assistance, such as medicines, water and blankets to the victims. Working with international organizations, Syria's Red Crescent Society is trying to get as much assistance to the victims as quickly as possible.

The United Nations is coordinating the emergency relief assistance to mitigate the effects of the tsunami disaster, and the Syrian Arab Republic supports that initiative. We pay special tribute to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for providing direct humanitarian assistance to victims and for launching an appeal for additional emergency humanitarian assistance. The 6 January meeting convened in Jakarta at the initiative of the Indonesian Government was also important for coordinating international relief efforts and made possible an international plan for providing required assistance and for mitigating the consequences of the tragedy.

The representative of Somalia spoke of the magnitude and the consequences of the tragedy; it changed the very topography of the Somali coastline. We express our appreciation to and solidarity with the international community, Governments and relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction organizations. They have demonstrated solidarity and cooperation by trying to cope with the disaster. We call upon them to ensure that the affected countries and peoples are assisted so that they can overcome the devastating physical and psychological effects of the tragedy. We urge donor nations and relevant international organizations and institutions to fulfil their pledges of financial and technical assistance.

We support the proposal that the Secretary-General appoint a special representative to coordinate international reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts with a view to mitigating the effects of the disaster in the medium and long terms. The Secretary-General should have access to all the necessary resources to ensure that the international community can rapidly respond to disasters and provide humanitarian relief. Preparatory work and initiatives should be carried out to that end. Preventive arrangements under the aegis of the United Nations should be established and public education on disaster warning and prevention should be conducted, especially in local communities.

It does not appear that tsunamis are limited to certain regions of the world. Other regions as well can be struck by catastrophes and tragedies similar to the one that struck South and South East Asia. We believe it is urgent to implement the decision of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to establish a regional mechanism for disaster prevention and preparation in order to mitigate the effects of disasters. It is also necessary to enhance national and regional capacities and to share necessary science and technology to establish a regional early warning system, thereby enabling countries and the international community to react in solidarity and partnership when disasters take place. Efforts to coordinate humanitarian assistance after natural disasters are also necessary. Solidarity throughout the world demonstrates that such a course of action is necessary to relieve the suffering caused by such disasters.

It is an honour to add my country's name to the list of sponsors of the draft resolution, which the General Assembly should adopt unanimously.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation supports the statement by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. I would like to add a few additional comments.

First, on behalf of our delegation, I once again express our deepest condolences to those countries affected by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. We grieve together with the peoples of those States, and we assure them of our ongoing support.

In the light of the devastating consequences of the natural disaster, on the instructions of the President of the Russian Federation, our country began to send

humanitarian assistance to the affected countries on the very next day following the catastrophe. On 27 December, aircraft of the Ministry of Emergency Situations delivered to Sri Lanka search and rescue teams with special equipment and rescue dogs. Humanitarian deliveries to the region followed, including urgently needed supplies, water purification stations, mobile electric generators, tents, bedding, disinfectants, drinking water and food. In response to the request made by affected States, we began an airlift of Russian equipment and medical staff on 9 January for deployment on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, and a field hospital and health and anti-epidemic teams were sent to Thailand and Sri Lanka. In addition, Russia has allocated more than 20,000 tons of grain for the people of the aforementioned three countries. As of 14 January, the aircraft of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations and Ministry of Defence have already conducted 20 flights to the region, delivering humanitarian supplies totalling more than 500 tons.

Russia is giving assistance to the affected countries not only on a bilateral basis but also within the framework of multilateral efforts. The Russian representative took part as an observer in the early January meeting in Jakarta on disaster relief in the Indian Ocean. A Russian delegation is now taking part in the work of the World Conference for Disaster Reduction, which began today in Kobe, Japan, during which there are plans to discuss, among other things, the lessons to be drawn from this tragedy.

In a statement at the Geneva donors conference on 11 January, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation announced that the Government has made a decision to allocate $22 million to mitigate the consequences of the earthquake and the tsunami; of that sum, $12 million will go to the World Food Programme, $3 million to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, $3.5 million to UNICEF and $3.5 million to the World Health Organization. With respect to the airlift by the Russian Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Natural Disasters of humanitarian assistance, medical supplies and food, the Russian contribution to alleviating the consequences of the disaster has amounted to date to over $33 million.

For us, as for the international community, it is important properly to assess the tragedy that has occurred and to draw appropriate conclusions from it. We feel that the following must clearly be taken into account.

There is a growing need in the current circumstances for the capacity to predict emergency situations, to prepare for them in advance, and to react swiftly to them. Of particular timeliness in this instance is the effort to strengthen the machinery to plan for such situations in the future.

We must strengthen national early warning systems so that the damage caused by natural disasters can be evaluated and their consequences mitigated. That should lead to the establishment of a global network for early warning in major emergency situations. In that connection, we welcome the initiative of States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to establish such a regional system and, as a sponsor, we actively support the draft resolution before the Assembly.

We believe that the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction must continue to seek to integrate emergency response machinery into development programmes, which is of particular importance to the developing countries in the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In all of this work, a principal mobilizing and coordinating role must, of course, continue to be played by the United Nations, which, as experience has shown, can ensure that the humanitarian needs of afflicted populations are met in the most effective manner. In that regard, it is important for the Organization to recall the significance of transparency and accountability in allocating assistance provided by donors.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Israel shares the international community's deep sorrow over the thousands of lives lost to the ravages of nature and its profound sense of concern for those victims still suffering.

The United Nations was itself born out of calamity. Its birth heralded the fact that cooperation and international brotherhood could bring rays of light to even the darkest of times. We face an analogous situation today. So many innocent people have been lost to us and intense distress has been visited on those who have survived, but the cooperation being exhibited by the international community is a manifestation of the fundamental moral unity of mankind and a reaffirmation of the United Nations founding principles. That cooperation transcends nationality,

race, ethnicity and religion, for this is a tragedy that is felt around the world, and providing for those who have been most savagely affected by it is the responsibility of all.

Israel is proud to be playing a part in the recovery effort. We feel that the moral responsibility to ease the suffering of fellow human beings extends beyond borders, geography and politics. To that end, Israel has been honoured to put some of our capabilities and know-how about dealing with disasters, gained through bitter experience, at the disposal of those nations struck by the tsunami. We are pleased to have contributed financially to the relief efforts of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), attesting to our continued support for the general mandate and humanitarian work of OCHA. In addition, a plane from Israel's El Al airline recently flew to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, carrying 85 tons of emergency aid materials donated by Israeli organizations and companies.

Emergency kitchens are providing hot meals for some 4,000 people per day. An Israeli mobile medical clinic has been set up and a separate medical delegation specializing in trauma has already begun work on the ground in Sri Lanka. Israel's Magen David Adom, as part of its ongoing increasing cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, participated in the relief efforts both independently and in concert with other Federation partners. Israel also sent a police forensic unit specializing in casualty identification, as well as psychological teams very experienced in post-trauma situations.

Israeli aid to Indonesia has included 16 tons of baby food, 30 tons of rice, flour, water, sugar and grain, and 20 tons of medicine. In addition, non-governmental Israeli organizations have donated two water purification systems and 12 communication networks. As the Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry recently said, Indonesia is

> "the largest Muslim country in the world, with which we do not have diplomatic relations. I feel that they received our aid as it was given, from heart to heart, Jews helping Muslims in times of distress."

Indeed, although the world has just witnessed the depths of cruelty that nature is capable of unleashing, we are now seeing the extent to which international brotherhood and universal human morality can fuse us all in times of real need. Let us hope that the sense of international solidarity brought on by the relief efforts is not temporary or isolated, and that our empathy for those suffering does not end at the shores of the countries affected by this disaster. Rather, we should continue to unite to help all those around the world who are in distress. Each and every life is sacred. As the Talmud teaches us, "He who saves one human life saves the world entire."

Mr. Adel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to express our gratitude for the urgent consideration of this agenda item on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.

I endorse the statement made by the representative of Guinea on behalf of the African Group.

In solidarity and deepest sympathy, we address our sincere condolences to the Governments and families of the victims of the tsunamis that struck a number of friendly countries in South and South-East Asia and East Africa, including our sister country of Somalia. We also express our solidarity as human beings in the face of that tragic natural disaster.

The countries that have been stricken by this catastrophe have suffered human and material losses that require the coordination of assistance from the international community, the United Nations and its specialized relief agencies. They must not only provide emergency assistance, but also continue to provide a wide range of medium- and long-term aid so as to ensure the success of national and regional reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, normalize the lives of the survivors in those countries and enable them to overcome the effects of the catastrophe.

We would like to express our gratitude to those donor countries which have provided debt and debt servicing relief to the affected countries. That will undoubtedly help the States affected by the disaster to accelerate the implementation of their reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes.

In this context, Egypt also supports the draft resolution submitted for consideration by the General Assembly today. We also invite member States to support the draft and to work actively towards its implementation.

The Egyptian delegation has on many occasions, in particular in November 2004, during our general debate on this agenda item, stated the importance of coordination by the United Nations of humanitarian assistance, and it underlined also the need for prioritization and an integrated approach in dealing with natural disasters at their various stages.

I should like in that connection to commend the active and effective role played by the Secretary-General and by the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in dealing with the crisis and in coordinating relief efforts. We hope that the assistance being provided by States and international financial institutions, for which we express our gratitude, will continue and be doubled so that humanitarian assistance can be adequately funded, with a view not only to alleviating the devastating effects of the increasing number of natural and environmental disasters on poor nations that have taken place in recent years, but also to acting in accordance with the principle of solidarity and international integration and in keeping with the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

For its part, Egypt has decided to send urgent humanitarian assistance to the most affected countries by using its aircraft to provide food, medical assistance, medicines, tents and blankets to the affected countries, in coordination with these countries and in accordance with their needs and priorities. The Egyptian Government wishes thereby to express its solidarity with those friendly countries at this time of crisis and to help in international efforts to cope with this disaster, which has caused such a tremendous loss of life and has so seriously damaged the region's towns and infrastructure.

Finally, we would like to express Egypt's full solidarity with the affected States and peoples as well our readiness fully to cooperate with the international community and the United Nations in working to help cope with this disaster and to avoid any repetition of this tragedy in future.

Mrs. Patterson (United States of America): We recently witnessed one of the worst displays of natural destruction in history. More than 150,000 lives were lost in the 26 December earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Families have been struck by devastating grief, losing loved ones, homes and livelihoods. The American people offer their profound sympathy to the peoples and nations touched by this tragedy, and we recognize and are grateful to the leadership of the United Nations in coordinating assistance to victims of the disaster.

As President Bush said, in the midst of this tragedy we have also witnessed one of the greatest displays of compassion. People and nations are working to ease the suffering brought on by this terrible disaster. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that more than $3 billion has been pledged by donors so far, one of the largest humanitarian relief operations in history.

The United States Government has made an initial commitment of $350 million for disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction for victims of the tsunami. America's armed forces and emergency response specialists from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been sent to the region to support relief efforts and are distributing aid 24 hours a day. In addition to United States Government support, tsunami victims have also received aid from American citizens, non-governmental organizations and businesses.

Despite these valiant international efforts, there should be no illusion as to how long it will take to rebuild affected communities. The United States is committed to the long-term reconstruction of the affected countries. The primary responsibility for rebuilding lies with the disaster-struck countries themselves, and reconstruction plans will reflect their priorities. The international community has a chance to work alongside those affected. It will be vitally important for donors to continue to work in close, coordinated fashion with host Governments, each other and the agencies conducting assessments so that resources are used effectively.

It is also imperative that reconstruction efforts include the establishment of a warning system to reduce the likelihood that widespread death and destruction from such a disaster will occur again. The United States strongly supports a global warning system, conducted under the aegis of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). We encourage those nations interested in a global tsunami warning system to work with the GEOSS consortium of 54 nations to develop the technical and data-

handling aspects of such a system. GEOSS is particularly important because it is an already existing framework for international coordination and deals with data-sharing and availability issues. The United States encourages all nations to operate within the GEOSS framework, building on its existing, promising, multilateral format.

Any development of a regional warning system should be part of an integrated global system. An internationally coordinated tsunami warning system already exists in the Pacific Ocean — the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Tsunami Warning System. The implementation of a global warning system should be carried out by expanding the existing UNESCO tsunami warning system in the Pacific Ocean into the Indian Ocean and anywhere coastal communities are threatened by tsunamis. Within this global design, the United States believes that the development of an Indian Ocean part of the global warning system should be a top near-term priority.

A detection and monitoring system for tsunamis is necessary but not sufficient to reduce a tsunami disaster. The technical systems for detection and monitoring must be complemented by an assessment of existing warning capabilities, training of local officials, installation of national and local warning communications systems, and a process of public education that will enable citizens in susceptible areas to respond appropriately to warnings. National and local officials in threatened nations must be prepared to respond to warnings within minutes and to communicate warnings to local populations via sirens, mass media, specialized radio systems and other notification technologies. Response plans must be developed nationally and locally well in advance of a hazardous event, and the public must be well educated about response plans. National and local authorities must take the lead in educating their populations about response plans.

Finally, monitoring and warning systems should be designed with the intent of serving to alert at-risk populations about all major hazards in their area, and not exclusively about tsunamis and earthquakes. This "all-hazards" philosophy should permeate thinking on the development of a global warning system.

The United States is committed to working with international partners to develop and improve such a system. At the third Earth Observation Summit in Brussels, to be held on 16 February 2005, the United States will present its preliminary plan for a global tsunami detection and warning system. That plan will be consistent with the points I have made here, namely, that the United States supports the development of a global, all-hazards warning system, conducted under the aegis of GEOSS and building on the existing UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific.

In the best tradition of the United Nations, the international community has stood together with the affected countries to respond to the devastation of the South Asian earthquake and tsunami of 26 December. We commend the level of international cooperation in that humanitarian response and particularly note the dedication of United Nations staff members all across the globe who have worked tirelessly on that complex operation. We must continue to work together to develop a global warning system to prevent such massive destruction and loss of life from happening again, whether from an earthquake, tsunami or other form of natural disaster.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): First, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting to discuss the consequences of the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in the Indian Ocean.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Morocco, I express our profound sympathy and sincere condolences to the leaders, the families of the victims and the peoples of the region affected by that natural disaster.

Morocco, which at the beginning of last year suffered a deadly earthquake affecting its northern provinces, shares the grief and suffering of the peoples that were victims of that tragedy, whose scale and unexpectedness struck the entire world. The international community, including civil society, the private sector and the general public, reacted spontaneously and with great generosity to aid the affected populations.

We pay tribute to the role and the initiatives of our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, subsequent to the tragedy, in particular his appointment of a

coordinator of all emergency assistance and relief operations in the devastated areas.

For its part, Morocco has done everything within its means to assist the disaster victims. We immediately sent emergency relief assistance, consisting principally of medicines and other urgently needed items. Moroccan non-governmental organizations actively provided support to victims in the brotherly countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives.

The generosity and the solidarity demonstrated attest to the existence of a worldwide awareness that we all belong to a single planet, threatened by common phenomena and catastrophes that could strike any time anywhere.

The consequences of the earthquake and tsunami are disastrous for the populations and the economies of the countries affected. The rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected region will take time and require massive investment in the short term, as well as in the medium and long terms.

The collected funds and the pledged assistance, however considerable they may seem, will not suffice for the complete reconstruction of the damaged areas. Sustained support from the international community is vital in that respect. International and regional financial institutions must play an essential role in the reconstruction of the socio-economic fabric and the basic infrastructure, in order to restore hope to the affected peoples.

The tragedy that has struck the Indian Ocean touches us all. It demonstrates once again our vulnerability to natural phenomena and reminds us that we must incorporate disaster prevention and disaster risk reduction into our development policies. The tragedy underlines the need to strengthen the global capability to respond to disasters — as the representative of the United States has just noted — and the importance of implementing early warning mechanisms and of strengthening international cooperation to that end.

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which began today in Kobe, Japan, provides an opportunity for all Member States to identify measures to guard against the risk of natural disasters. When I say "guard against", I do not mean, of course, that we can prevent natural disasters but that we can at least reduce the risks to human life and property. The Conference is timely, coming just after the earthquake and tsunami in Asia, at a time when international public opinion and world leaders are focused on that part of the world and on the tragedy that has just taken place. The international community should not fail to take advantage of this unique opportunity to take concrete measures to reduce the disaster risks, to establish early warning and response mechanisms and to strengthen the capacity of poor countries to prevent disasters.

Experience in dealing with the consequences of natural disasters of recent decades has demonstrated that poverty exacerbates the risk of devastation caused by natural disasters. Earthquakes, cyclones, floods and droughts cause more victims and damage in poor areas, where people do not have the means or the capability to foresee and prevent situations of that type or to respond appropriately when a disaster occurs.

Natural disasters should prompt us all to redouble our efforts to foster peace, mutual assistance and international solidarity and to act collectively with a view to reducing the risk of disasters of all types and origins and, when they occur, to be prepared in order to limit the loss of human life and material damage.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that Morocco, which has become a sponsor of the draft resolution introduced by the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of the countries affected by the tsunami and others, hopes that the text, once adopted, will be implemented as speedily as possible with a view to ensuring that the international community can continue to mobilize and to cope with the gravity of the situation.

Mr. Oshima (Japan) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to express our pleasure at seeing you preside over this meeting, which is obviously of great importance to the entire international community.

(*spoke in English*)

First of all, I would like to extend my deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims of the 26 December tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, as well as to their families. I wish to reiterate Japan's solidarity with the countries affected by that unprecedented tragedy and express our sincere respect for the tremendous relief efforts their Governments and

people have deployed to cope with that extremely dire situation.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his leadership in guiding the United Nations efforts; to all United Nations agencies and their aid workers who are providing assistance, day in and day out, under extremely trying circumstances; and especially to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland and his team from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, who are doing an outstanding job coordinating humanitarian assistance and helping to raise funds from the international community. The concerted international response, both public and private, has been truly remarkable.

For its part, my country, Japan — itself highly prone to natural disasters — has been providing assistance in every way it can by mobilizing its personnel, assets, knowledge and expertise, and by providing financial support.

With respect to the deployment of personnel, we have sent several civilian disaster-relief teams to the affected region to provide emergency relief and medical and other assistance to the devastated areas in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Japan has also mobilized assets of its self-defence forces for maritime search-and-rescue operations, air transportation, epidemic prevention and medical treatment.

To date, Japan has pledged $500 million as its immediate grant contribution and in response to the United Nations flash appeal, which covers support over the next six months. Japan will complete disbursement this week of half of its grant contribution, $250 million, which will be allocated directly to United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other international organizations that are engaged in relief and rehabilitation. The $250 million will comprise about 25 per cent of the flash appeal launched by the Secretary-General in Jakarta 12 days ago.

Moreover, Japan, as a fellow Asian country, will provide the remaining half of the $500 million pledged to the most severely affected Asian countries — Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, among others — through bilateral grant aid, and that bilateral assistance will also be disbursed immediately. I join the Secretary-General in appealing to other countries that have pledged assistance to implement their pledges as quickly as possible.

The word "tsunami" is a term that derives from an old Japanese word meaning "harbour waves" or "port waves". It suddenly crashes down on a harbour or port — usually populated areas — after going undetected on the high seas. To prevent or mitigate the damage and suffering that tsunamis can cause after a massive earthquake in the ocean, an early warning system is critically important. After the painful lesson of the tsunami disaster caused by the huge earthquake that struck Chile in 1960 — in which crashing waves as high as 12 metres swept down on that country and, hours later, impacted the beaches of other countries of the Pacific rim, including parts of Japan — the International Coordination Group for the Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific was established under the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and a round-the-clock monitoring and warning system was created, with a key monitoring centre in Hawaii, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Today, 18 January, as we speak, the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction has just opened in the city of Kobe, in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, where, it will be remembered, a severe earthquake struck the city and killed over 6,000 people 10 years ago. One of the lessons from the recent tsunami tragedy is the need for an early warning system for the region. Japan, as the host country, has proposed a special session at the Kobe Conference that would be dedicated to the discussion of the establishment of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region. We hope that a concrete plan of action will be agreed upon at that meeting so that the concerned countries in the region, with the support of the international community, will begin their work on a reliable mechanism of early warning.

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), UNESCO and other relevant agencies, working together with the donor community, should play a key role in such efforts, building on the experience and expertise gained in the Pacific Ocean early warning system. In that effort, Japan can and will contribute significantly by providing the necessary knowledge and expertise that it has acquired through its own experience over the centuries with many

earthquakes and tsunamis. In addition to a financial contribution of $4 million to ISDR for promoting international cooperation in that area, in close collaboration with UNESCO, Japan stands ready to cooperate with the United Nations and other interested donor countries, as well as coastal countries directly concerned.

It is a stark fact that nearly 75 per cent of the world's population live in areas that have experienced at least one serious natural disaster event of one kind or another — earthquake, typhoon, cyclone, hurricane, flood, drought and so on — over the past 20 years. Billions of people in over 100 countries are known to suffer periodically from the effects of natural calamities. Every day, on average, natural disasters claim the lives of close to 200 people around the world. In 2003 alone, 700 natural hazards resulted in 75,000 deaths and economic losses of more than $65 billion. Thus, unmitigated natural disasters not only take high human tolls, but also destroy economic and social infrastructure and set back development, particularly in developing countries, which in effect constitutes a dire threat to human security. They have a particularly severe impact on the poor — either a country or a population within a country — by exposing and augmenting vulnerabilities. They adversely affect, in no insignificant way, our fight against poverty, hunger and disease.

Despite that stark reality, the issues relating to natural disasters are, in my view, unfortunately underestimated by nations and by the international community, including the United Nations system. Not enough attention has been paid to the importance of disaster reduction and not enough political will has been mobilized, particularly in addressing the impact of natural disasters on development.

If awareness of the need for an early warning system is one lesson learned from the current tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, another lesson that should be learned is the need to enhance the political will to cope with natural disasters by incorporating, for example, disaster prevention and mitigation into national development planning. Natural hazards cannot be prevented, but damage caused by hazards can be prevented and avoided by proper preparedness, response and mitigation efforts.

That point is strongly emphasized in Japan's Initiative for Disaster Reduction through Official Development Assistance, which was announced by Prime Minister Koizumi on the occasion of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction now taking place. The amount of Japan's official development assistance directed to projects and programmes for disaster reduction has been at the highest levels among donors, with some $300 million in fiscal year 2003. Based on the Initiative, Japan will continue to actively support the efforts of developing countries to build a disaster-resilient society through a comprehensive menu of assistance, such as institution-building, human resource development and infrastructure development.

As the Secretary-General has emphasized, support from the international community to help the disaster-stricken countries in the Indian Ocean should not stop at immediate relief, however important that is. Given the magnitude of the disaster, assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction will need to be provided over the long term. The international community must sustain strong political will to that end. Japan stands firm in extending the maximum possible assistance to rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, as well as to immediate relief.

I sincerely hope that the outpouring of compassion and the unity of purpose shown around the world will help strengthen international cooperation and resolve to address the many problems faced by the world community, including disaster prevention and reduction, climate change and a development strategy that incorporates disaster reduction, all with a view to opening up a new vista for the future.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): I thank you very much, Sir, for helping us to organize this meeting today.

We wish to join in reiterating our Government's condolences to the people and Governments of the countries of South-East Asia and the east coast of Africa who were victims of the unprecedented devastation caused by the undersea earthquake. The tsunami hit India, Indonesia, Kenya, Maldives, Madagascar, Seychelles, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Thailand, and claimed thousands of lives. For example, a South African Inter-Ministerial Committee delegation visited Somalia and discovered that more than 300 people had died and that 54,000 were displaced by the tsunami. South Africa itself lost a number of its citizens and we are still searching for many that remain missing. We can therefore understand

why the world has responded so urgently and warmly to the victims of that unprecedented disaster.

We note with appreciation the response of the many countries that have given assistance to the victims of the tsunami. The commitments made by the international community in Jakarta and Geneva are unprecedented. My delegation is particularly pleased that the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), responded promptly and in a manner that has done our Organization proud. However, it is the donations by people of all ages and from all walks of life, including from every corner of the world, that are indeed heart-warming. Those people have taught us that solidarity remains possible in addressing global disasters.

Both Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, have underscored the importance of ensuring that the international community remains committed and involved in the recovery and also in the reconstruction phase of the crisis. It is a hopeful sign that many world leaders have already acknowledged that their support for the tsunami victims is long-term and will in no way detract from commitments made to other development and humanitarian crises.

My delegation supports the call for the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to coordinate humanitarian support for the United Nations. We also believe that the creation of an international disaster fund under the management of the United Nations is urgent. That would enable the United Nations to respond to the immediate needs of those affected by disasters while more long-term assistance is being mobilized.

Furthermore, South Africa, like many other countries, is supportive of the establishment of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean region. The establishment of such an early warning system would link well with Africa's plan to address humanitarian disasters in a regional manner following the adoption by the African Union of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, we committed ourselves to an integrated, multi-hazard and inclusive approach, especially in the strengthening of early warning systems and the need to enhance institutional capacities to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management.

From the lessons we have learned in the aftermath of the tsunami, including the devastation caused by hurricane Ivan in Grenada and Haiti, it is evident that the developing countries do not have the domestic resources to recover on their own. The efforts of developing countries to obtain the necessary capacity and means to strengthen their own responses to crises continue to be frustrated by declining levels of official development assistance and lack of foreign direct investment. Furthermore, many pledges made to provide assistance for reconstruction to developing countries that have suffered from natural disasters remain unfulfilled.

The report of the Millennium Project, led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, confirms that assisting developing countries to achieve the international development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, will not be possible if the status quo remains. The report calls for a major scaling-up of investments in development, as well as for stronger and more effective international action on debt relief, trade and science and technology.

It is indeed ironic that the tsunami disaster happened at a time when we were in the midst of preparing ourselves for an important summit to be held in September 2005, at which some of us feared security issues were going to overwhelm the global agenda. The lesson from the tragic events in South-East Asia and the east coast of Africa, however, is that underdevelopment remains a permanent threat.

At the recent international meeting in Mauritius on the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Secretary-General reiterated the interconnectedness of development and security, and highlighted developmental challenges such as extreme poverty, climate change and the spread of infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

My delegation believes that, as we continue to prepare for the summit in September 2005, the important element throughout will be how we begin to develop global partnerships among developed and developing countries and involving private and civil society that can address both security and development. The challenge for us will be how we can

act collectively, based on unwavering political commitment at all levels, to address the needs of the developed and the underdeveloped to create a better life for all. For that reason, we fully endorse the draft resolution before us today.

Mr. Tesch (Australia): Let me begin by reiterating the Australian Government's deepest condolences to all those affected by the earthquake and tsunamis that struck the Indian Ocean region on 26 December.

I would also like to express our appreciation to the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for their initiative in proposing this draft resolution on the tsunami disaster and response. It is important that we recognize and discuss this important issue in this Hall, and we are very pleased to be sponsoring the draft resolution.

Australia commends and strongly supports the leadership role that affected countries have played in the response to this disaster. Excellent regional cooperation swung into action immediately after the tsunami, and the international community's response deserves high praise indeed, but we would equally like to pay tribute to the way the countries of the region, ASEAN and others have come together in their response to this disaster.

We would also commend the role the United Nations is playing in the coordination of international assistance to tsunami-affected countries. Agencies such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) are also playing an important role in the delivery of emergency relief. We are strongly supportive of the coordination role of the United Nations in the emergency response and would particularly like to recognize the contribution that Mr. Jan Egeland, Emergency Relief Coordinator and head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has made.

Australia's assistance to victims of the tsunami disaster has been immediate, generous, closely coordinated with the national capacities in the tsunami-affected communities, and targeted to priority needs. It is a clear reflection of our commitment to the Asia region.

The Australian Government has provided 60 million Australian dollars for emergency relief across the region, funding direct support by Australians sent to the affected areas, as well as the activities of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In addition to the immediate emergency assistance we have provided and continue to provide, the Australian Government has announced a 1 billion Australian dollar, five-year partnership for reconstruction and development between Australia and Indonesia. That programme will assist Indonesia to recover from the devastating impact of the tsunami and is the biggest single aid package in Australia's history. Importantly, it recognizes that emergency relief is just the tip of the iceberg of the true impact of this disaster. The recovery process and the rehabilitation and reconstruction work will take many years and cost many billions of dollars.

Another component of our response is the assistance being provided directly by the Australian Defence Forces and Australian Federal Police, which have fielded relief teams to assist with medical and victim identification services.

I think it is also important here to acknowledge the response from the public and private sectors around the world, including in Australia. As is happening the world over, the people of Australia are expressing their sympathy and their support for those affected by the tsunami disaster. To date, the Australian public has contributed some 190 million Australian dollars to the relief and rebuilding effort. A national day of mourning was observed across Australia on 16 January, and, here in New York, a relief concert will be held next week, on 26 January — coincidentally, the national day of India, one of the affected countries, and also of Australia — to help raise funds for the victims of this tragedy.

In addition to responding to the relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation needs, a key element of the draft resolution that we will be adopting today is about better systems for warning of such disasters, for preparing for their impact and for mitigating the damage that they do. We stand ready to help the region take forward efforts to prepare for, mitigate against and respond to future disasters, and we look forward to continuing our cooperation with other delegations.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, allow me to express once again, on behalf of the Chinese Government and people, our

deepest condolences to the families of the victims and the most sincere sympathy to those who lost loved ones in the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster on 26 December last.

Let me first thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's meeting, which is being held at the initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, which I should like to thank as well. Let me also express my gratitude to the delegation of Kazakhstan for the statement it made on behalf of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization — a statement that we endorse.

The Indian Ocean tsunami is a disaster for all of humankind. The international community has responded positively and strongly with an unprecedented global humanitarian emergency relief effort. The United Nations, for its part, has played an important leadership and coordination role. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the heads of the United Nations agencies concerned paid timely visits to the disaster-stricken areas to carry out inspections and provide guidance in disaster-relief efforts. The Secretary-General also attended the special ASEAN leaders' meeting on the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami and, on behalf of the United Nations, made urgent appeals to the international community for post-disaster reconstruction.

Today we are considering a draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", submitted by Laos at today's resumed meeting of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. This meeting has provided Member States with the opportunity to pool their wisdom in order to help the affected countries and reflects the human spirit of togetherness in times of difficulties and disasters. The Chinese delegation supports the convening of this meeting and hopes that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

Since China is a developing country that is also prone to natural disasters, we have a profound understanding of the damage and the suffering endured by the affected people. As a friendly neighbour of the afflicted countries, we have been filled with anxiety and sympathy for their plight. In the wake of the catastrophe, the Chinese Government immediately launched its emergency mechanism and started a foreign disaster relief operation, the largest ever in China's history. The Chinese Government pledged $2.6 million in assistance the very next day. Later, in view of further developments, the Chinese Government committed to contributing another $6.5 million and is giving positive consideration to relieving the hardest hit countries of their governmental debt that had fallen due or to reducing their payments.

Individual donations by the general public in China have exceeded $12.1 million, including those from the elderly and children. One man of over 80 visited the local Red Cross office twice to contribute from his very modest pension. A six-year-old pupil led by his mother donated more than 1,000 yuan in coins he had saved over the past few years. Some young people personally called on the ambassadors of affected countries in China to make their contributions and express their sympathies. In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, more than 500 million Hong Kong dollars have been raised. The Chinese Government has also dispatched medical and rescue teams to the affected areas at very short notice. The Macao Special Administrative Region has also sent a rescue team to the disaster-hit area.

At the special ASEAN leaders' meeting on the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, Premier Wen Jiabao announced that the Chinese Government would respond to the United Nations appeal with a donation of $20 million for multilateral relief and reconstruction efforts within the United Nations framework. At the United Nations ministerial meeting on humanitarian assistance to tsunami-affected communities held in Geneva, the Chinese Government confirmed that it would make its contribution, via the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to the United Nations agencies — including the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the International Organization for Migration — for their emergency relief, post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction operations. China will consult with the Office on a detailed programme to distribute the aid and, in light of the needs of the affected countries, give priority to sanitation, drinking water, education and infrastructure restoration. We also hope that our contribution can be added to United Nations assistance in establishing an

early warning and response mechanism for regional disasters.

As a Chinese saying goes, "when one place is in need, assistance comes from all quarters". The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster has demonstrated yet again that closer international and regional cooperation is an effective means for coping with natural disasters. The Chinese Government would like to join all Governments in a concerted effort to help the affected countries mitigate against disasters, rebuild their homes and restore their life to normality.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): At this time of international bereavement, Tunisia reiterates its condolences to the affected countries of South Asia and Africa for their human losses resulting from the tsunami.

We further wish to express our esteem for the generous pledges of contributions made in response to the United Nations emergency appeal for the stricken countries. May that expression of worldwide solidarity and generosity help to limit the impact of the enormous human suffering caused by the disaster and to address the considerable needs for emergency assistance and long-term recovery aid.

In making its modest contribution as a symbol of compassion and solidarity with the victims, the Tunisian authorities, at the behest of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, have equipped four planes to carry humanitarian assistance in the form of food, blankets, tents and medicine.

My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his decision to send a special envoy for emergency assistance and reconstruction to the countries affected by the tsunami of 26 December.

Above and beyond the tsunami — a borderless phenomenon that brutally struck eight Asian countries and five African — 2004 was a year of destruction for many countries due to the effects of climate change, rising sea levels and hurricanes of exceptional violence that struck several regions around the world. There are many lessons to be drawn from those many catastrophes. The first undoubtedly concerns the need to establish an early warning system at the regional and international levels.

In that connection, my delegation joins in the Secretary-General's appeal for the establishment of a worldwide early warning system for all natural disasters and the decisive implementation of measures in response to climate change. Indeed, the 26 December tragedy has highlighted once again the need to create a worldwide warning and prevention system covering not only tsunamis, but also all other destructive phenomena, such as the effects of rising sea levels caused by global warming, tidal waves and hurricanes. The system should cover the areas most vulnerable to such phenomena, including the Mediterranean.

The mourning triggered by the tsunami in South-East Asia and Africa is global. The great movement of solidarity that it has generated is unprecedented. We express the hope that this moment of heightened solidarity in the history of our planet will further bolster our commitment to our Organization and to its ability to meet present and future humanitarian challenges throughout the world.

Tunisia has become a sponsor of the draft resolution before the Assembly and hopes that it will help us to continue effectively to address the problems of the countries stricken by the recent tragedy.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): As I speak, the world has been plunged into mourning by the tsunami, a natural disaster that has killed tens of thousands of people, unleashed terrible suffering and destruction, and bereft hundreds of thousands of people of their livelihood.

I should like, on behalf of the Government and the people of Bahrain and on my own behalf, to express our heartfelt condolences and deep sympathy to the families of the victims and the peoples and the Governments of the friendly nations affected by this humanitarian disaster — a catastrophe unprecedented in recent history. We would also like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for its initiative to convene this important meeting. I would also like to thank the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement for their support for the holding of this meeting.

The world was shocked by the undersea earthquake that struck the Indian Ocean region. It was horrified by the total destruction of cities and the disappearance of villages and the deaths of thousands of innocent children and young and elderly people. The disaster affected all alike — large and small, strong and weak, rich and poor. They were all at one stroke

displaced, dispersed and left with no families. People lost children, husbands, wives, mothers and fathers. Homes, churches, mosques and temples were all destroyed, without distinction.

One mitigating factor in this great tragedy is, of course, the solidarity, sympathy, immediate response and support expressed by the countries of the world to all those affected by the disaster, without regard to geographic, political, religious or ethnic distinction. We hope that that solidarity will continue among all of humanity. This is a time when we truly need such solidarity and compassion — a time when the lack of security and stability has caused many problems and much conflict among nations. This one earthquake has brought together all countries, large and small, and demonstrates in a positive manner what we can do in the face of the unexpected effects of nature's anger.

In calling for emergency assistance to the affected States, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that the international community would need more than $900 million over the next six months in order to cover the cost of emergency humanitarian assistance to the approximately 5 million people who have been affected by the catastrophe. Given the nature and scale of the disaster, solidarity on the part of the international community is an absolute necessity if those countries that have been affected are to overcome the consequences of the catastrophe.

Dealing with the effects of this grave disaster requires immediate assistance to the inhabitants of the affected areas, who will need to take steps to prevent such catastrophic consequences in the future. The international community will need to make a collective effort to establish an integrated early warning system in order to predict and to protect against such natural disasters, in terms of both preparing for and mitigating their destructive effects.

States and international, non-governmental and civil society organizations have all shown great solidarity in helping those affected everywhere, despite incalculable difficulties. I would like to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to all those countries and organizations that so rapidly provided emergency assistance to the affected States and their peoples.

We are deeply concerned about the possibility of the spread of communicable lethal diseases, such as cholera and malaria, among the survivors, and we believe that every necessary precaution should be taken to protect them. We also believe it extremely important to ensure the immediate provision of safe drinking water and emergency health services. The World Health Organization can play an extremely important role in these very difficult circumstances.

In addition to emergency relief, many survivors need psychological rehabilitation, medicines and medical treatment. They also need to regain their means of livelihood and to overcome the effects of the catastrophe. That will require the support and solidarity of the entire international community, which provided assistance in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was shocked by this humanitarian disaster and immediately responded to the call of duty, providing emergency assistance totalling $2 million to the affected States, in addition to sending the emergency material and humanitarian assistance that the people of Bahrain contributed through the humanitarian organizations that are active in the field. Bahrain has always shown solidarity with friendly States and peoples through good times and bad. We have always provided assistance at difficult times, and our people and Kingdom, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, will always do so.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): We have been witnesses to the worst earthquake and tsunami disaster in recent history, a disaster that will be with us for years to come. Our deepest condolences go to the families of those who have lost loved ones.

The disaster has hurt millions, depriving them of their livelihoods, of everything they have. Now we must focus on them. We must make sure that immediate humanitarian aid can reach all the affected communities, many of which now are displaced. This is a race against time, and if we lose the race, more people may die from disease, lack of clean water and malnutrition than from the tsunami itself. There is also an urgent need to provide support to the many who are suffering from shock and loss. Here, highest priority must be given to the special needs of children.

Sexual exploitation and trafficking in human beings often increase in the aftermath of a crisis. We are pleased to see the emphasis on the need to protect women and children against violence and sexual abuse in the request for humanitarian assistance in the emergency phase.

Effective coordination of humanitarian assistance at all levels, based on actual needs, is imperative. We must all work together if our joint efforts are to have maximum effect. Norway supports United Nations coordination at all levels in the emergency and early reconstruction phases, in close cooperation with national and local authorities.

Access to the areas concerned is crucial for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. The prime responsibility lies with the Governments of the affected countries to ensure safe access.

The United Nations clearly proved its ability to play a leadership role and to mobilize international support in the early phase of the tsunami. The response to the flash appeal for the urgent and immediate needs of communities most severely affected, launched less than two weeks ago in Jakarta, is unprecedented.

A record number of countries are contributing generously to the tsunami crisis. In that regard, long-term commitments from the international community are vital. We must help to rebuild livelihoods and communities. In that regard, the particular needs of women and children must be met.

As regards donor coordination, a clear division of labour must be established, both in the emergency phase and the reconstruction phase. The donors must not compete with each other in providing assistance for a short period after the disaster, only to disappear when media attention moves elsewhere.

Norway is in favour of a mechanism that tracks donor pledges in major humanitarian and reconstruction operations such as these and is pleased to see the initiative taken by United Nations in this regard. There is a need for seamless transition from humanitarian assistance to rehabilitation, reconstruction and long-term development. In fact, these efforts must overlap.

As for Norway's assistance, we have so far disbursed approximately $17 million in humanitarian assistance. In addition, we will provide approximately $170 million as an extra-budgetary allocation for humanitarian relief, reconstruction and development assistance in the affected areas. In addition, Norwegian individuals and private companies have so far contributed more than $60 million.

We must also consider ways of improving the systems for preventing and limiting the effects of natural disasters such as tsunamis. Early warning systems must be improved, but we should also consider how to make societies more resilient. The World Congress on Disaster Prevention, which opened in Kobe, Japan, earlier today, is an excellent opportunity to pursue this issue in more concrete terms. We know that the future will bring more natural disasters. It is not in our power to prevent this from happening. But it is in our power to decide how to prepare for and respond to such situations. Our despair over the enormity of this disaster must be channelled into motivation to ensure much better preparedness next time nature strikes. Our compassion for the millions of victims in Asia must translate into concrete support and long-term attention.

Mr. Kim Sam-hoon (Republic of Korea): The Government and the people of the Republic of Korea stand in solidarity with all those who have suffered from the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean. We mourn the loss of those who have perished, and we extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims.

The devastation inflicted by the earthquake and tsunami is of such epic proportions that the world is still struggling to come to terms with it. However, in the face of such horror, the spirit of cooperation and friendship that the countries of the world have demonstrated in coming to the aid of the countries affected has been truly remarkable.

The Governments and peoples of the countries affected deserve the highest praise, for they are the ones who have suffered and yet they remain at the forefront of the relief efforts. At the same time, the massive international assistance effort that has emerged is a testament to the global community's ability to put aside political differences and unite behind a common cause. The United Nations, as coordinator of the international community's response, has distinguished itself once again as the world's pre-eminent body for tackling the global challenges of the twenty-first century.

My Government is committed to providing not only immediate relief but also medium- and long-term assistance to ensure that full reconstruction and recovery are realized. Accordingly, in addition to $5 million in emergency relief, we have pledged another $45 million over the next three years for rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance. Furthermore, we

dispatched a military cargo plane to Sri Lanka and cargo carriers carrying transportation and construction equipment to Indonesia to assist in the delivery of relief material and reconstruction. We will be closely following rebuilding efforts and considering further ways to contribute to the recovery process.

The tsunami disaster has underscored the need to establish an integrated tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean region. Such a system would enable countries at risk to exchange information on disaster forecasts and to undertake a joint response to natural disasters. In that regard, we have high expectations for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which is currently being held in Kobe, Japan. We sincerely hope that the Conference will achieve concrete and tangible outcomes that will contribute to the establishment of an early warning system for the region.

For our part, my Government stands ready actively to contribute its expertise in information technology to expedite the establishment of such a system.

Furthermore, as the country holding the chairmanship of this year's Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, the Republic of Korea places a high priority on disaster prevention and assistance and will actively lead cooperation efforts to enhance the preventive capabilities of member countries.

The current disaster relief efforts have brought to the fore the increasingly vital role played by civil society and non-governmental organizations in providing effective emergency relief and rehabilitation. From Indonesia to Sri Lanka and throughout the entire region, we have seen private aid groups, charities, non-governmental organizations and concerned citizens lending their assistance to those in need.

My Government strongly supports the role of local and global civil society in emergency relief. My country has established a Public-Private Assistance Partnership Forum, which undertakes nationwide donation campaigns and dispatches medical and relief volunteers to areas where they are most needed. Through that partnership, cash and goods worth more than $15 million have been provided by civil society and the business community, and more than 900 relief and medical personnel were sent from both the Government and non-governmental organizations to the tsunami-affected areas.

With the passing of time, humanitarian emergencies tend to be forgotten, especially when new emergencies occur that divert the attention of the global community. As we say in our country, the beginning is like the head of a dragon, but the ending is like the tail of a snake.

This time, we must not forget. We must ensure that the pledges are fulfilled and that assistance is provided for as long as it is needed. Moreover, assistance must be accurately targeted and appropriate to the needs of the people. We applaud the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for moving in that direction, and we welcome its measures to enhance the transparency of the distribution process for tsunami funds.

We cannot afford to have to say in hindsight that the global response to the tsunami of December 2004 was business as usual. As unprecedented as the devastation has been, let us endeavour to make the effectiveness of the response reach new levels. The Republic of Korea is committed to that end.

Ms. Dovzhenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, on behalf of the Government of Ukraine, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the peoples of the countries that were stricken by the unprecedented natural disaster that occurred on 26 December 2004, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and caused enormous material and environmental damage. For me, as a member of the Government of Ukraine responsible for issues related to children, families and young people, and as a woman and mother, the news of the deaths of tens of thousands of people was especially bitter.

In response to this challenge, the Government of Ukraine immediately provided humanitarian assistance to the stricken countries and decided to make a financial contribution to UNICEF to provide assistance to the children who had suffered from the tsunami in South-East Asia. In our view, it was the effective cooperation among the Governments of the stricken countries, the relevant United Nations bodies, donor associations and non-governmental organizations that enabled us to provide emergency assistance in a very short period of time to those who had suffered as a result of this catastrophe.

However, that machinery requires further improvement. First and foremost, the effectiveness of such operations in saving lives and material resources

depends on the warning time for a looming threat and on how soon rescue operations begin when an emergency has occurred. In that connection, we believe it necessary to create a global rapid-reaction mechanism for implementing the steps needed to provide emergency humanitarian assistance, including implementing reserve agreements and exchanging information concerning existing resources in specific countries and the possibilities of providing assistance. We cannot afford to delay in finding solutions to those issues.

Ukraine, which experienced the worst technological catastrophe in history — the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear facility — is prepared to participate actively in the establishment of such a global mechanism at all levels. We believe that, during the United Nations summit this fall, it would be appropriate to submit specific proposals in that regard for consideration by Member States. In that connection, we welcome the proposal by the Government of Germany to hold a third international conference on early warning to discuss aspects of the global early warning system for waterborne meteorological and geological disasters. We call upon countries to actively promote that initiative.

We note with satisfaction that the draft resolution proposed by a group of countries contains concrete measures that could help us make today's world safer. In that connection, we announce our intention to join the list of sponsors of that document.

Because of the current trends of development and globalization, our world is becoming increasingly interdependent each year. Only together will we be able to reduce our vulnerability to disasters. The role of the United Nations is to ensure that all our efforts, in all countries, benefit our children and future generations.

Mr. Moeini Meybodi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to begin my statement by expressing the deep sadness of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the tragedy of the recent earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean and by expressing our sincere condolences to the people and the Governments of the affected countries. Today, we all gather here to express to them our sympathy and solidarity and to prove once again that, when calamity strikes, we are united in protecting and assisting our fellow human beings in need. Our appreciation goes to Mr. Jan Egeland and his able colleagues for their relentless efforts over the past three weeks in mobilizing and coordinating international relief efforts and assistance to the victims of this tragedy.

The recent tsunami, caused by an earthquake, was an unprecedented natural disaster with extensive and devastating effects. Many countries of the Indian Ocean were stricken by that brutal, swift and destructive disaster, whose impact was so widespread that more time is still required to assess the scope and extent of the damage. In addition, millions of people are suffering unimaginable physical and psychological trauma that will take a long time to heal.

The earthquake of 26 December 2004 took place precisely on the first anniversary of an earthquake that struck the city of Bam in my country and therefore brought back the painful memory of the great human losses caused by that catastrophe. After the tsunami, we witnessed the same swift response and generous spirit of solidarity on the part of the international community with the affected people. In that respect, we welcome the generous pledges and firm commitments of the international community, announced at the ministerial-level meeting held in Geneva last week, in response to the United Nations flash appeal for the tsunami-affected countries.

The Secretary-General, in referring to the Bam earthquake a few days ago, emphasized that "not all the money that was pledged for the Iran crisis has been disbursed". In fact, out of a total of $800 million in pledges, only $17 million has been disbursed one year after the disaster. We hope that this time, in response to the tsunami tragedy, all promises will be kept to assist the countries concerned in beginning the long-term efforts needed to rebuild the affected areas.

The experience of the recent tsunami and similar disasters remind us of the need for systematic and more coordinated international search-and-rescue operations. That would enable us to take full advantage of the crucial hours following the disasters and would save the greatest possible number of lives.

Although we should pay due attention to the post-disaster situation, a multi-hazard and well balanced approach to all phases of disaster management — including preparedness, relief, rehabilitation and long-term reconstruction — is absolutely necessary if any comprehensive disaster risk management strategy is to be successful. Therefore, we should focus more closely

on promoting measures that increase countries' resilience after natural disasters and reduce the devastating consequences of those disasters. In that regard, we hope that the World Conference on Disaster Reduction being held in Kobe, Japan, will see the adoption of effective and comprehensive policies and measures aimed at natural disaster management at all levels and that it will lay the foundation for an effective global partnership to implement such policies.

Although it may not be possible to prevent natural disasters, there are ways and means to at least mitigate their effects. Iran — especially after the devastating earthquake in Bam — is fully aware of the fundamental need to enhance disaster management capacities at the local and community levels. Equally important is the strengthening of regional and international capacities to support the national efforts of vulnerable countries. In that regard, there is a need to establish specialized regional cooperation centres that facilitate the exchange of scientific and technical know-how and equipment as well as the experiences of the affected countries. It is also imperative to promote international efforts in the fields of early warning and information exchange and to use the latest communications and surveillance technologies so that the negative consequences of similar tragedies may be curbed in the future. The use of satellite and remote-sensing technologies is particularly important for reducing the adverse consequences of natural disasters.

In that context, the situation of developing countries is unique. Serious technical, technological and financial challenges severely deepen the impact of disasters on the socio-economic infrastructure and the environment of developing countries. It is therefore crucial that we study measures to improve the response capacity of those countries and redirect the international community's support towards promoting access to related technologies and their transfer to the developing countries.

Needless to say, the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality should continue to guide all measures taken to provide humanitarian assistance to countries when natural disasters occur. Humanitarian assistance, including the provision of adequate resources upon the request of the Governments concerned, should be provided during all phases of a disaster.

On the day after the tsunami tragedy, the Islamic Republic of Iran began sending relief consignments to the disaster-struck areas and took part in the international relief operations. Now I have the pleasure to announce that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran intends to allocate $3.9 million in cash and approximately 223 tons of new relief items, valued at $1 million, in response to the flash appeal. The necessary arrangements to fulfil our pledge will be completed soon.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm once again our strong support to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and express our appreciation for its remarkable activities at this crucial juncture.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I extend our sincere condolences to the Governments and the peoples of the countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster that struck South-East Asia and part of the coast of Africa, resulting in thousands of innocent victims and damaging the economic and social infrastructure of those countries.

In spite of the heroic response of Member States in providing humanitarian assistance, we believe that humanitarian assistance is not a substitute for prevention or action to reduce risks associated with natural disasters, such as creating an early warning system to warn of future tsunamis and other natural disasters. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, now being held in Kobe, Japan, is a praiseworthy international initiative to study the necessary machinery and measures to help States deal with and avoid natural disasters.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has pledged $30 million for those States affected by the tsunami, both in direct aid and through international organizations specialized in humanitarian assistance. Public donations in various provinces of our Kingdom currently total $80 million. In addition, the Islamic Development Bank has announced that it will extend credits totalling $500 million to assist those affected by the Asian earthquake. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, met with the ambassadors of the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to study possible joint efforts to be taken by OIC member States in order to

provide rapid assistance for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami, which left more than 35,000 orphans in Indonesia alone.

Finally, I welcome the vital role of the United Nations in mitigating the effects of the natural disaster.

Ms. Nguyen (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Canada would first like to extend its deepest sympathies to all the nations, communities, families and individuals affected by the earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004. The magnitude of the loss of human life and the destruction impacting such a huge number of people is beyond the realm of understanding. Canadians mourn for those who have lost their lives, and our hearts go out to the tens of thousands of people affected by that disaster.

We commend the local communities, which were the first to respond following the disaster. We honour the humanitarian workers and all those who are uniting their efforts worldwide to provide the essentials for living to those left destitute. We are amazed at the acts of charity and the overwhelming demonstration of world solidarity, which the President of Indonesia described as a demonstration of global unity.

As the initial shock subsides, it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure a timely, flexible, coordinated and effective global response to this global tragedy. We are confident that the affected populations will recover and rebuild their communities. We applaud the leadership role taken by the Governments of the affected countries with regard to recovery and reconstruction. The role of the international community is to support the efforts of those Governments. The immediate humanitarian needs are immense. The long-term reconstruction needs have yet to be determined, but it is obvious that the situation will require sustained effort and unflagging commitment for some time to come.

Canada will do its part to respond to those expectations. We have committed $425 million towards a comprehensive package of disaster relief measures for disaster victims and reconstruction assistance. The commitment of the Government of Canada over the next five years includes a contribution that matches the donations made by Canadians, who over the past few days have demonstrated great generosity to Canadian non-governmental organizations involved in relief efforts on the ground. Our commitment also involves ongoing reconstruction assistance for the areas affected by the disaster and an immediate debt moratorium for any of the countries affected by the crisis that request it.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada fully supports the United Nations as the premier organization to coordinate the international response to the crisis and is working with other countries in support of the United Nations role. The United Nations, in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and well-established non-governmental organizations, has both the mandate and the expertise to ensure an effective and needs-based response to this dramatic crisis. In that regard, we have supported the United Nations flash appeal and the consolidated appeal recently announced in Geneva.

The principles of humanitarian action must guide our efforts. We the Governments must effectively coordinate our respective involvement, demonstrate flexibility and concentrate our assistance on needs and demand in order to best support and strengthen the central role of the United Nations in coordinating international humanitarian assistance. The people of donor countries have contributed generously in the form of donations and various types of involvement to help the victims, and they will expect that the aid be distributed effectively and that it find its way as quickly as possible to the individuals and the communities affected by the disaster.

Our involvement must also focus on national capacity-building so that we can be ready for such crises and alleviate their impact. The partners of the affected countries play a vital role. We are pleased with the spirit of cooperation that has directed the relief efforts to date and greatly facilitated access to humanitarian aid by the people who need it.

Respect for human rights and human dignity must be central to our efforts. It is vital that affected communities be full participants in the reconstruction activity and that women be integral to that process. It is also important to ensure that the vulnerable segments of the population, particularly women and children, receive assistance and to prevent all forms of exploitation. We applaud Government measures adopted in that regard. Moreover, since some of the regions devastated by the tsunami suffer from internal conflict, it is imperative that assistance not exacerbate

those tensions. Opportunities for peacebuilding should be sought out in the reconstruction phase.

Over the coming weeks, it will be crucial for us to reflect on the lessons from the disaster, particularly the importance of strengthening disaster preparedness and early warning mechanisms. The event has also reminded us of how poverty compounds the devastation caused by natural events. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which started today in Kobe, Japan, will provide a key opportunity to pursue such discussions.

Today, right now, we are connected by compassion, but we must not forget ongoing crises in other parts of the world, such as the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti. We must let those in distress know that we will be steadfast and that we will be there for them for as long as it takes.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): My delegation has already aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union. I would also like to stress the following.

Our deliberations today underline once again the deep shock and profound sorrow of the international community. The loss of more than 160,000 lives and the extensive devastation resulting from the earthquake and tsunami catastrophe in the South-East Asian and Indian Ocean region have been a human tragedy.

Our meeting today re-emphasizes the determination of the international community to provide full support and assistance to the Governments and peoples of the affected countries in their efforts to heal their wounds and launch a rehabilitation and reconstruction campaign. Our meeting today is therefore most timely and appropriate.

We all have full confidence in the determination and resilience of the stricken nations to rebuild their countries as soon as possible. Yet, the more the international community is prepared to help, the sooner the reconstruction of those countries can be realized. So far, the international community has acted with compassion and generosity. It is equally important that the support and assistance of the international community continue unabated.

The Turkish nation, which unfortunately experienced a major earthquake in 1999, wholeheartedly sympathizes with the nations affected by the latest natural disaster. On this sad occasion, I would kindly ask the representatives of those countries to convey once again to their Governments and their peoples the heartfelt condolences of the Government and people of Turkey.

Speaking of Turkey, my Government immediately joined others in responding to the emergency needs of the region. As a first step, cash donations were made to the countries affected. A search-and-rescue team was rushed to the area. Food, medicine, medical equipment and water purification units were flown to the two hardest-hit countries, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. A Turkish Red Crescent team is in the region and will remain there to contribute to humanitarian relief operations for the next five months. A medical team of 37 people, of whom 15 are doctors, will soon start offering medical services to the inhabitants of the Aceh region of Indonesia. Turks in Turkey, as well as those around the world, are participating actively in the fund-raising campaigns initiated by our Government and by Turkish private and civil organizations. The Turkish Foreign Ministry is also actively involved in a donation campaign of its own. As of today, the official and private donations and contributions of Turkey are in the vicinity of $15 million. Turkey will continue to do everything possible to help alleviate the suffering of the tsunami victims.

In my capacity as the Chairman of the group of States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), I conveyed to you, Sir, our group's support for the proposal of the group of States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to call the General Assembly to a meeting today. I would also like to reiterate the deep sorrow of the OIC Group, as well as its determination to be in full solidarity with the missions of the relevant countries.

As will be recalled, the Secretary-General of the OIC made an appeal to the member countries on 1 January to mobilize assistance to the region. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr. Gül, in his capacity as the current Chairman of the OIC foreign ministers, has also sent a letter to the foreign ministers of 56 member countries in support of the appeal. A committee composed of the Secretary-General of the OIC, the President of the Islamic Development Bank and representatives of Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey has been established to coordinate the humanitarian and relief assistance of member

countries for the victims, and particularly for orphans in Indonesia. Members of the OIC and its subsidiary institutions and organs are trying their best to help disaster-stricken countries and will continue to do so.

We all know that we cannot bring back those who have perished, but the international community must take all necessary measures to avoid facing such a tragedy ever again. Hence, Turkey strongly supports ASEAN's decision to establish a regional mechanism on disaster prevention, particularly a regional early warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region. My country stands ready to contribute as much as it can to the international efforts in that field, too.

Last but not least, I would like to express our deep appreciation and sincere commendation to the Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all other United Nations bodies and agencies for their prompt action and tireless work to initiate and coordinate the largest humanitarian relief effort in the Organization's history.

Mr. Noghès (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): At the end of 2004, at a time when the world usually allows itself a brief rest, nature managed to show us that a catastrophe of relatively short duration, but of extreme violence, could change the course of existence in many countries at once, taking the life of tens of thousands of women, men and children; causing even more people to go missing; and leaving behind devastated sites, causing important health risks for the survivors.

To all those countries and populations so gravely affected, we reiterate our feelings of compassion and solidarity. We commend with great respect the courage shown by the authorities and the populations involved, who mobilized to help the wounded and to find a great number of the missing. We praise the remarkable efforts the United Nations made in such a short time, as well as those of the many countries that showed such solidarity in the face of this ordeal.

Through the initiative of the Sovereign Prince of Monaco, our small country has, to the best of its ability, participated greatly in the immense outpouring of generosity shown by Governments, organizations, associations and the public. The Government of Monaco made an immediate contribution of $130,000 to the United Nations' Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the same amount was given to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies by the Monaco Red Cross, chaired by Crown Prince Albert, which to date has received more than $1.4 million in donations.

The World Association of Children's Friends, presided over by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover, decided to allocate funds received to the restoration of schools and health-care centres. Similarly, Monegasque non-governmental organizations are striving to take concrete actions. For example, the Monaco Aid and Presence Association is making a special contribution to the Princess Grace Orphanage in Kalutara, Sri Lanka.

This terrible tragedy has shown how greatly the world can act in such circumstances. It has also shown that the media can play a significant role in such a mobilization and that it might also contribute to meeting the needs of populations that are deeply distressed although not themselves victims of the disaster.

Let us remember, however, that much remains to be done in terms of natural disaster prevention, in particular through the creation of effective warning systems and that we should establish a body for designing the response to a disaster of such an unforeseen nature and scale. For that reason, the Principality of Monaco has decided to sponsor draft resolution A/59/L.58.

Mr. Mammadov (Azerbaijan): First, let me, on behalf of the people and the Government of Azerbaijan, extend our deepest condolences to the victims and the families of the victims of the tsunami disaster that took place in the Indian Ocean. Azerbaijan sincerely shares the grief of the peoples of the affected countries and expresses its deep sympathy to and solidarity with all the bereaved. The scale and the impact of that devastating disaster clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of the countries of the Indian Ocean region and their limited capacity to respond effectively and in a timely fashion to unforeseen natural disasters. The lack of effective early warning mechanisms, which prevented the tsunami-affected countries from being prepared for the horrific disaster, was another bitter lesson for us all.

In that connection, we expect practical outcomes from the World Conference on Disaster Reduction now being held in Kobe, Japan, from 18 to 22 January. We believe that the Conference will succeed in establishing

the necessary framework for our future action to prevent and prepare for natural disasters.

We fully support the efforts of the international community in response to the urgent needs of the communities severely affected by the tsunami and welcome the United Nations flash appeal for the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. We highly commend the work done by the United Nations, in particular the tireless efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, and his able team in coordinating assistance to the affected countries. It is essential that close cooperation and coordination among the Governments of the affected countries, the donor community, United Nations entities and international aid agencies are continued in order to ensure the efficiency of assistance.

For its part, Azerbaijan has allocated $1 million to United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance for immediate relief needs. We believe that international solidarity and assistance must continue beyond the immediate disaster period and focus on two parallel activities: reconstruction and rehabilitation and the establishment of an early warning system in the Indian Ocean. We attach particular importance to the establishment of such a system in the region and stand ready to support the affected countries in their efforts to that end.

As a result of the tsunami, according to the latest count, at least 160,000 people lost their lives, more than half a million were injured, and 5 million others, including more than 1 million children, were left without basic services. We are deeply concerned about the health needs of populations worst affected by the tsunami and support the World Health Organization in carrying out the five key tasks that will be the focus of its work in the coming months. We fully share the view that urgent action should be taken to address the need for early warning to pre-empt the spread of the epidemics and deadly diseases that can follow hard on the heels of natural disasters.

The emergency phase is rapidly shifting to recovery and rehabilitation. During that transition, sustained support should be provided to ensure that medium- and long-term needs of victims, in particular those of children, are adequately addressed.

Azerbaijan welcomes and supports the initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in submitting a draft resolution on strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. We believe that adoption of the draft will serve to mobilize more international assistance in terms of both immediate relief and long-term recovery. We hope that through the implementation of the draft resolution we will succeed in addressing our concerns with respect to the strengthening of mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and respond to the natural disasters.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The tragedy that struck South-East Asia on 26 December 2004 was one of the worst of the modern age. Its toll surpasses understanding. We are all struck with humility before these forces of nature that are beyond human scale. We thank the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for their initiative, which has gathered us here today. The draft resolution that we are preparing to adopt is representative of the will of the affected countries and the international community to respond rapidly and concretely to that tragedy. The draft resolution underlines the importance of reducing the vulnerability of States and populations to the risks posed by nature, in particular through a culture of prevention and preparation at all levels. The draft resolution underlines the importance of effective and sustained cooperation to support long-term efforts, taking into account the specific needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including children. It reminds us of the importance of transparency and responsibility in the allocation and use of resources.

Switzerland immediately reacted to the crisis. It released $23 million in emergency assistance and deployed three helicopters and 50 soldiers to Aceh in the service of humanitarian organizations. In close coordination with United Nations system, and in particular with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and jointly with the peoples and authorities concerned, Switzerland dispatched approximately 100 specialists to the field, which it made available to international humanitarian agencies.

Swiss private donations also reached a record level — $145 million to date. Switzerland is also committed to the formulation of adequate responses on the part of financial institutions and of intergovernmental institutions such as the Paris Club. Other measures will also be taken.

The tragedy that we are confronting must not make us forget the many other humanitarian crises currently taking place. Many other victims are in need of assistance and protection. The admirable response of the international community to the Asian crisis should not be to the detriment of necessary programmes elsewhere in the world, be it in the field of humanitarian assistance, cooperation for development, or the promotion of peace and of human rights.

The combat against poverty must remain the cornerstone of our actions. While natural disasters ravage poor and rich countries like, people living in poverty are more susceptible to them because of the following factors: less solid housing; insufficient access to means of communication; bad roads that make it more difficult to flee the danger or to assist the victims; and more fragile health infrastructures.

Emergency assistance is useful, but it is only that — emergency assistance. It is reconstruction and development assistance that puts us squarely on the path of sustainability.

Finally, this meeting coincides with the opening of the World Conference on Disaster Prevention in Kobe. That Conference provides an opportunity to develop strategies for prevention, preparation, education and response with respect to various kinds of disasters.

We must make up for any delays in those areas in order better to deal with future challenges. Switzerland also hopes that the Kobe Conference will promote the strengthening of the relevant structures in the context of the United Nations international strategy for disaster prevention.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus): There are watershed events in life, and the tragedy in the Indian Ocean is set to become such a watershed for the whole of humankind. The tremendous scale of the resulting devastation and human suffering makes us question the limits of what is possible for humankind. It may also teach us a few important lessons.

Compassion and human solidarity, which transcend state borders, will save the world. We admire the truly generous assistance provided by the major developed and developing countries, international organizations, and public and private donors. Relief campaigns of this kind are the only kind of nobly motivated money race — the kind that enables true international leaders to emerge, not by claim or force but through recognition.

We highly commend the fast, coordinated and effective emergency relief efforts of the United Nations system. They alone are sufficient proof of the increasing relevance and importance of our Organization.

The people of Belarus convey their sympathy and compassion to all the people who lost their loved ones in the killing waves. As people are doing in dozens of nations throughout the world, Belarusians are grieving and giving. Belarus is not a donor country, but we, too, are doing what we can to help. A week ago today, dozens of tons of food, living essentials and technological equipment, including 125 advanced water purification systems — with a total value of more than $100,000 — were delivered, by decision of the President of Belarus, to one of the countries most affected by the disaster — Sri Lanka.

The world was not prepared for the disaster, but it could have been. People were powerless in face of the calamity; they should not have been. The establishment of comprehensive disaster early-warning systems — not just tsunami-related and not just regionally — has become a truly vital factor for world security. Real progress in meeting the challenge of preventing such a horrible loss of human life can be made only when we finally understand a simple truth — for killer waves, earthquakes and hurricanes, the world is not one of States and regions; it is simply one world. That destructive force can be effectively countered only with the unified effort of the world community. In that connection, we welcome the practical proposals made from this rostrum by the representatives of Japan and of the United States.

In view of the recent drastic increase in the frequency and intensity of severe natural calamities and the ever-higher degree of vulnerability of the developing countries, the international community should take prompt and decisive measures. The United Nations has to take the lead in this respect.

Last but not least, it would be only fair — not to mention noble and right — for the enormous volume of emergency assistance provided and pledged to the affected countries not to be subtracted from the development assistance commitments made by major world donors before the disaster struck. Should donor countries take the easier way in these calculations, they

will have betrayed the expectations of billions of people in the developing world and the hope that human solidarity can not only deal with the effects of disasters but actually help, one day, to prevent them. But it is our belief that they will not be.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): Brazil welcomes the convening of this meeting of the General Assembly on the strengthening of disaster relief assistance and rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention activities following the disaster caused by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. It provides an opportunity for States Members as a whole to convey our deep sorrow and sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the Governments and peoples of those Indian Ocean States that suffered a tremendous loss of life and socio-economic and environmental damage as a result of the tsunami. It provides us also with an opportunity to commend the leadership assumed by the affected States as well as the speedy mobilization and response on the part of the international community in the area of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and to express our full support for such work.

Brazil welcomes the pledges made by donor countries and international financial institutions. We urge all donors to make good on their pledges without delay and to continue to provide the necessary funds and assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. We are concerned about the medium- and long-term social, economic and environmental consequences of the disaster in the affected countries. The international community's commitment must be sustained. We agree that we must not lose our focus once we have moved past the emergency stage. We must maintain the political will to support the affected countries and their peoples, particularly the poor, so that they can fully recover from the traumatic effects of the disaster and rebuild their lives.

Brazil responded immediately to the disaster. Four aircraft were sent to the region, the first of which reached Bangkok on 1 January with 160 tons of medicines, foodstuffs and water. The genuine solidarity of the Brazilian people with the victims of the tsunami resulted in the collection of a further 100 tons of water, medicine, clothing and foodstuffs, which is being gathered throughout the country to be packed up and dispatched. Furthermore, the Government is preparing to send medical and engineer units to assist in reconstruction and also in demining efforts.

As we all know, the disaster has had an impact on many States and nationalities throughout the world. It was with great sadness that we learned of the loss of our esteemed colleague, Counsellor Lys Amayo D'Avola, a Brazilian diplomat who was serving in Bangkok, and of his 10-year-old son, Gianluca.

My delegation would like to emphasize the importance of international cooperation in supporting the efforts under way in the countries affected with a view to dealing with all aspects of natural disasters. The convening today of the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction is an opportunity to draw up a framework for a disaster reduction strategy for this century. We support the idea of creating, as a matter of urgency, regional mechanisms for monitoring, early warning and assessment to deal with hydrometeorological and geological dangers at the global level. Donor countries and international financial institutions should provide additional funds so that all countries can fully implement disaster reduction strategies and mechanisms.

While certain horrific crises are often highlighted by the main global media, others seem, unfortunately, to be almost ignored. The lack of support for so-called forgotten emergencies is a subject that requires our careful attention. We must ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided on a non-discriminatory, well-balanced and proportional basis. Humanitarian assistance must be provided on the basis of existing needs.

In the case of the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, we greatly welcome the effective cooperation among the affected States, the United Nations system and its family, donor countries, developing countries, international financial institutions and civil society in the coordination and provision of humanitarian assistance.

It is encouraging to see that the international community has confronted this catastrophe in a true spirit of cooperation. We hope that this favourable climate of solidarity will continue and will serve as an example of how to respond to other crises and grave problems. We hope that the resources mobilized as a result of this tragedy will truly be additional resources, and that they will not come at the expense of economic and social "tsunamis", such as poverty, hunger, and HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The Furies have unleashed themselves upon the Earth once again, this time with unspeakable ferocity in the form of the Asian tsunami. It left behind catastrophic death and destruction, untold misery and immeasurable suffering. In the wake of such dreadful devastation, the international community displayed a sense of solidarity that fills us with justifiable pride. It responded promptly and generously, with feeling and humanity. The United Nations appropriately assumed a leadership role, in conjunction with the affected countries. Governments and civil society forged a unity in the face of such stupendous adversity. These were commendable reactions.

My own country, despite its many and varied constraints, joined the relief operations at a very early stage. We dispatched ships and aircraft loaded with necessities, as well as troops to assist those affected. As all are aware, Bangladesh itself has been relentlessly buffeted by the vagaries of nature. But years of tireless endeavour have enabled us to devise systems and to reorganize infrastructures so we can predict, withstand and reduce the impact of natural calamities. These are experiences that we will be happy to share with societies of comparable milieu in due course.

While we cannot prevent natural disasters, today we have the wherewithal to mitigate their effects. We have the technology to make predictions. The United Nations can, and should, coordinate this regionally and globally. The proposal to set up a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean region deserves our strong support.

An early warning in itself will not be sufficient to save life and property. It must be accompanied by relevant and adequate protection and relocation programmes. In our own case, we have devised an intricate system in Bangladesh to extend the warning to the remotest corners of the country, to immediately mobilize thousands of urban and rural volunteers and to help the population reach hardened shelters. As a result, human fatalities from disasters have been vastly reduced.

The paramount challenge for the affected communities is always rehabilitation and reconstruction. The international community, under United Nations leadership, must keep adequate resources readily available for disaster-prone countries. The relevant multilateral institutions should sharpen their focus on the environment so that human tampering with nature is reduced. As we meet today, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction is being held in Kobe, Japan, with a view to launching a new framework for action to increase the world's resilience in the event of natural disasters. Also, in February Bangladesh will host a summit of South Asian leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, at which the tsunami and related issues will be high on the agenda.

To fight disasters, we need determination. It is also Bangladesh's experience that, in such cases, we have also been helped by the pervasive cultures of pluralism and democratic values that render public actions more accountable and authorities more responsible. That helps to create the necessary degree of social mobilization and popular participation. The results, as we have seen, have always been positive.

Out of chaos is often born the dancing star. From such tragedies we take lessons, and learn. Nature and man have lived in harmony. They have also been in conflict. But at all times man has eventually triumphed. Let the United Nations, man's greatest multilateral institution, retool and revamp itself to be better able to confront calamities and, where it can, harmonize the relationship between man and nature. That is not too tall an order, and, in any case, as has been said, man's reach should exceed his grasp, for what else are heavens for?

Mr. Aspelund (Iceland): First, I would like to join all my colleagues in expressing our deepest condolences to the victims of the tsunami tragedy. No continent has fully escaped the effects of that violent natural phenomenon, although countries in the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asian region have been particularly hard hit. In some of those countries, entire communities have been swept away, and survivors have been left with severe psychological trauma, in addition to being exposed to the risks brought about by destroyed infrastructure and a lack of essential supplies. There is a risk that development will be set back several years if the necessary aid is not forthcoming.

Iceland would like to commend the rapid action taken by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and by many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We also commend the actions of all contributing nations, in

particular of the authorities of those nations most badly affected.

The immediate humanitarian emergency continues. The Icelandic Government has already donated approximately $2.5 million, of which more than $500,000 will go to UNICEF, the World Food Programme and a number of NGOs for immediate humanitarian work.

But we are also very aware of the long-term needs in those countries. As part of a significant across-the-board increase in its development aid, Iceland had already decided to allocate 25 million Icelandic krónur for development cooperation with Sri Lanka. That aid will be tripled to 75 million krónur, equal to $1.2 million. Our development aid agency will carry out a reassessment in the light of the recent disaster with a view to contributing as effectively as possible to reconstruction.

In addition, the Icelandic people as a whole have shown solidarity with the victims of the tsunami. So far, some $4 million has been collected by NGOs through public donations. That is approximately $13 per Icelander.

As a country well aware of the impact of earthquakes and other natural disasters and of the destructive power of the sea, Iceland will continue to follow developments and will seek to contribute where it can. We support the importance attached to establishing as quickly as possible an early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

Mrs. Taylor Roberts (Jamaica): My delegation wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting at the request of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations group. It is entirely appropriate that the General Assembly should devote specific attention to the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster, which has brought devastation on an unprecedented scale to island and coastal States in the Indian Ocean. We mourn the loss of life and the anguish of the survivors.

The magnitude of the catastrophe requires a commensurate response from the global community. The States affected are all developing countries, and for them this is a major calamity: billions of dollars in damage and the destruction of economic livelihoods.

The world response has so far been commendable, and generous offers of assistance have been pledged and delivered. With respect to the emergency relief efforts under way, we appreciate the positive role played by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in cooperation with donor countries, international agencies and non-governmental organizations. We note in particular the timely launch of the flash appeal by the Secretary-General at the international conference held in Jakarta on 6 January, and the positive response in terms of pledges and actual contributions by many Member States, including developing countries, to assist the affected countries with emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Recognizing the scale of the tragedy, the Government of Jamaica, notwithstanding the economic difficulties facing the country, has also played its part by making a contribution of 15 million Jamaican dollars and has put in place arrangements for contributions by the public at large.

The flash appeal that has been launched covers a six-month period. Our focus at this meeting should go beyond that time frame. Simultaneous action on a longer-term strategy should be considered and should cover the broad picture of disaster prevention management and recovery. We identify three elements.

First, while emergency relief is the first priority, plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the devastated countries have to be developed. Specific programmes and special arrangements for economic recovery, with necessary financial resources and incentives for the affected countries and States, should be devised.

Secondly, there is clear need for increased cooperation on an early warning system capable of speedy communication of information on earth movements and threatening atmospheric patterns. We welcome the intention of the organizers of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened today in Kobe, Japan, to propose a special session on the issue at the Conference.

Thirdly, there is continuing need to develop and strengthen national and regional capacity in disaster management and mitigation. Local and regional response teams will always be the first line of defence against the destructive impact of natural disasters.

In recent times, developing countries, especially island and coastal States, have suffered very severe

setbacks in development prospects due to natural disasters. In the Caribbean, we have our own experience with hurricanes, and during the last season we suffered widespread devastation. That most recent tragedy has dramatically illustrated the vulnerability and hazards many of us will continue to face from nature's destructive potential. We believe that this experience should serve to strengthen the spirit of cooperation, partnership and joint efforts in disaster prevention and relief operations based on human solidarity and common purpose.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.